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Cicero, Gregory the Great, and Thomas More: Three Dialogues of Comfort

OF THE THREE MAJOR WORKS that Thomas More completed in the Tower, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* is the most recognizably humanist because of its use of the dialogue, a favorite classical and patristic genre. K. J. Wilson and Germain Marc'hadour have noted correspondences between More's dialogues and those of Cicero[1] and Gregory the Great.[2] This study will examine Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, Gregory's *Dialogues* and More's *Dialogue of Comfort* more extensively, focussing on the following points: 1) their authors, 2) the dialogue form, 3) the settings, 4) the times, 5) the double speakers, both mentors and disciples, 6) major themes and moral exempla, and 7) general resemblances.

I

Although separated from each other by many centuries, Cicero, Gregory and More resemble each other as political leaders and moral philosophers. Cicero (106–43 BC) was in his public career the most outstanding Roman orator and in his private life, the father of a beloved daughter Tullia. Her death in childbirth and his political danger as a loyal republican prompted Cicero to write the *Tusculan Disputations* in 45 BC, the year before the murder of Julius Caesar and two years before his own assassination.

Elected to the papacy in an era of social and political turmoil, Gregory (ca. 540–604) saved the city of Rome from attack by the Arian Lombards. When no help was forthcoming from the Byzantine emperor, he allegedly placated King Agilulf by paying a huge sum of money and a yearly tribute drawn from church sources.[3] Gregory expressed an apocalyptic view of his age in the commentaries on Job in the *Moralia* and in his *Homilies on Ezechiel*, as well as in his *Dialogues* (593–94). In a more hopeful spirit, he sent Augustine of Canterbury to evangelize the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Celtic Britain.

After a long career as a royal councillor, Thomas More (1478–1534) was appointed Lord Chancellor, the highest political office under the king. Like Cicero, he had a favorite daughter, Margaret. Arrested on April 17, 1534 because he refused to take an oath implying England's ecclesiastical independence from Rome, More was confined in the Tower of London for about fifteen months. There he completed three books, including *A Dialogue of Comfort*. Finally he was condemned to death for treason and beheaded five days later on July 6, 1535. Challenged by the political revolutions of their age to write about moral courage in the face of death, More and Cicero put their principles into action while Gregory was, at least, a martyr in spirit.

Each of these authors pretends that his book is a spoken discourse later written down. Cicero begins each of his five subdivisions with a dedication to "the noblest Roman of them all" (*Julius Caesar*, 5.5.68) and thus presents the *Tusculan Disputations* as a direct address to Brutus. At the beginning of his *Dialogues* Gregory notes that he will record the conversations with Peter the Deacon that had taken place earlier (Prologue 1, p. 5).[4] At the end of More's *Dialogue of Comfort* Vincent declares that he will write down his conversations with Antony in Hungarian and German, his two vernaculars (p. 326, *CW* 12:320).[5] The half-title at the beginning of the work claims, however, that this book was "Made by an Hungarian in Latin, and Translated out of Latin into French, and out of French into English" (p. 3, *CW* 12:3). In his edition of *A Dialogue of Comfort*, Leland Miles suggests that the version we have is only a first draft and that More would have removed these inconsistencies if he had had the opportunity to revise his work.[6] The three authors probably did discuss suffering and death with their friends, though More prudently sets his conversation in another country. In any case, the urgency of real exchange is preserved under the guise of dialogues transcribed.

The two Catholic authors wrote their books to give strength to others, while Cicero hoped to assuage his grief for the death of his daughter Tullia and the downfall of the Roman Republic. He explains to Brutus at the conclusion of the *Tusculan Disputations* that in composing this book, "I cannot readily say how much I shall benefit others; at any rate in my cruel sorrows and the various troubles which beset me from all sides no other consolation could have been found" (5.41.121).[7] Gregory wrote his *Dialogues* to give encouragement especially to the clerics, monastics and devout lay people which his narratives describe.[8] His interlocutor Peter gives the proper interpretation of Gregory's numerous exempla, "Even when we are in great distress we can be certain that our Creator does not abandon us. These amazing miracles are proof of it" (3.30, p. 166). In his fictional role as interlocutor, Gregory never acknowledges fear. Perhaps he felt it incumbent upon himself as chief pastor to provide an image of confident leadership to his flock. Antony, too, presents an image of cheerful fortitude to Vincent, even though More confesses his "heauy fearfull heart" in a Tower letter to Margaret.[9] In his biography of More written in 1557–58, Nicholas Harpsfield explains More's purpose in composing the Tower Works:

> [H]is principall drifte and scope was to stirre and prepare the mindes of englishe men manfully and couragiously to withstande, and not to shrinke at, the imminent and open persecution which he fore[sawe] and immediatly folowed, against the vnitie / of the Churche and the catholike faythe / of the same.[10]

Thus Cicero, Gregory and More demonstrate a fortitude that is an inspiration to their weaker fellows.

Because Cicero and More both wrote their dialogues in a time of public and personal crisis, it is not surprising that they treat similar topics: the prospect of poverty, disgrace and death weighed against the supreme value of a virtuous life. Yet there is more than an accidental resemblance between the two books. An examination of his Tower Works, Latin writings and other dialogues will demonstrate More's knowledge of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*.

Scattered references to the *Tusculan Disputations* occur in the *Responsio ad Lutherum*, *A Dialogue of Comfort* and the *De Tristitia*. But the *Utopia* contains the most striking reference (1.43.104), a paraphrase of the saying of Anaxagoras, "From all places it is the same distance to heaven" (*CW* 4:51), *Vndique ad superos tantundem esse uiae* (*CW* 4:50). The commentary notes "the characteristically humanistic and Christian change of *ad inferos* (to the lower world) to *ad superos* (to heaven)."[11] Nearly twenty years later More would defend his contentment with his prison

cell to his exasperated wife Dame Alice, "Is not this house . . . as nighe heauen as my owne [manor in Chelsea]?"[12] Thus it is possible that More consciously modelled aspects of his dialogue on a similar composition of his classical predecessor.

One of many witnesses for traditional Catholic teaching, Gregory appears in numerous litanies of Fathers and Doctors in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* and the *Confutation Against Tyndale*. According to Germain Marc'hadour, Gregory is quoted more frequently than any other Father, except Augustine, in these two works of controversy.[13] In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Gregory's *Dialogues* (4.42, pp. 249–50) are directly named as the source of the miracle performed by the deacon Paschasius while still in purgatory:

> And so fynd we (as I remembre) in the dyaloges of saynt Gregory / that one had helpe by prayer made vnto an holy man late deceaced whiche was hym selfe yet in purgatory. So lyked it our lorde / to let the worlde knowe / [that] he was in his specyall fauour / thoughe he were yet in payne of his purgacyon.(*CW* 6:215)

The many miracle stories in Gregory's *Dialogues* offer a precedent for More's defense of miracles in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*.

In the *Confutation Against Tyndale* Gregory is praised as proof that, contrary to the Reformers' assertion, the Church's teaching maintained its continuity from the patristic era through its so-called period of degeneracy:

> And syth they call that tyme the tyme of thys .viii. hundred yeres last passed: lette vs take the tyme in whyche saynt Gregory was pope / for that is now more than .ix. hundred yere a go. And saynte Gregory was a good man and a good pope, and so good that I thynke none heretyke dare for shame saye the contrarye. (*CW* 8:925)

More's *Confutation* also recounts a miracle from Gregory's life in which the saint persuades a matron to believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharistic loaves she herself had made (*CW* 8:276). The transformation of the bread into a bleeding fragment of finger has the same literalism as many of Gregory's exempla. The source of this miracle is not the *Dialogues*, but the Latin biography of Gregory (Chap. 20), written by an anonymous monk of Whitby in the early eighth century.[14] The story was eventually incorporated into the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, later translated into English and published by William Caxton in 1483.[15]

More held Gregory in special veneration because this pope had initiated St. Augustine of Canterbury's missionary expedition to the Anglo-Saxons. In the last speech at his trial, More emphasized this filial relationship of the English Church to Rome:

> So might St Gregorye, Pope of Roome, of whom, by St Austyne, his messenger, we first receaved the Christian faithe, of vs Englishmen truly saye: "Yow are my children, because I haue geuen to you everlasting salvacion, a farr [higher and] better inheritaunce then any carnall father can leaue to his child, and by [re]generation made you my spirituall children in Christe."[16]

Given his devotion to this sixth-century pope and his knowledge of Gregory's *Dialogues*, More could have indeed modelled his *Dialogue of Comfort* on elements in the *Dialogues* of his spiritual father.

II

A Dialogue of Comfort is humanist chiefly because of its dialogue form, a literary mode created by Plato. In fact, Plato's Epistle 7 offers a helpful definition of "dialogues" as "benevolent disputations by the use of question and answer without jealousy" (344B).[17] Plato's dialogues, however, usually imitate the mental process of searching for the truth instead of the conversion of a disciple to the truth that the master presents. This latter type of dialogue clearly does not follow the Platonic model but adopts the method of Aristotle in his lost dialogues. As G. L. Hendrickson explains, "Aristotle and his school modified the Socratic form by assigning to a leading speaker a larger and more continuous role, lightened by interludes, interruptions, and transitions, shared in by other speakers."[18] Thus Cicero, Gregory and More all follow the Aristotelian and not the Platonic form of dialogue.

During the Summer of 45 BC Cicero composed a dialogue in five books called the *Tusculan Disputations*. The second word of the title, "Disputation," can be misleading since the organization of the work is more formal than the older meaning of "conversation" but less polemical than the modern meaning of "controversy." A. E. Douglas, in his comprehensive essay on "Cicero the Philosopher," remarks that the work would be more inviting to prospective readers if it were called simply "Discussions at my country-house at Tusculum."[19] After an exchange of pleasantries between the interlocutors, the discussion moves into a straightforward refutation by "M." of a thesis proposed by "A."

Each discussion concludes with the expression of satisfaction volunteered by "A." at the end of Books I and II or presumed by "M." at the end of Books III, IV and V. Of the three dialogues we are considering, this work is the most intellectually challenging because of its predominately abstract material.

As a sequence of short narratives, Gregory's *Four Books of Dialogues on the Life and Miracles of the Italian Fathers and on the Immortality of the Soul* are easy to read. Their intellectual challenge lies in recognizing the biblical antitypes on which his many saints' lives are patterned. Although Gregory received a typical Roman education in grammar, rhetoric and law,[20] his literary antecedents are the Christian classics. From the piety of his family background and his monastic training, Gregory became familiar with Christian dialogues based on the Ciceronian model. These include the *Dialogues* of the Gallic Father Sulpicius Severus and the *Collations* of Cassian on the teachings of the Egyptian Monks.[21] If Gregory knew anything of Plato's theories or dialogue form, it was probably through the philosophical writings of Cicero or Boethius.

More had read Plato's dialogues, preeminently *The Republic*, and with the collaboration of Erasmus had translated five of Lucian's dialogues from Greek into Latin.[22] Unlike More, Plato and Lucian usually present half a dozen characters in their dialogues. Boethius was also one of More's favorite authors. In her letter to Alice Alington describing her visit with More in the Tower, Margaret relates how her father quoted from the work written while the Roman consul was himself in prison (Book 2, Prose 6, 1.147).[23] Like More's *Dialogue of Comfort*, *The Consolation of Philosophy* has two interlocutors, the austere Lady Philosophy and the distraught Boethius. While not claiming that More had actually read Petrarch's *Secretum*, Howard B. Norland notes another use of two interlocutors, the accusatory Augustine and the remorseful Petrarch.[24] Yet Antony's avuncular sallies and Vincent's respectful replies are more congenial in tone than the exchanges related by Boethius or Petrarch. The mentor-disciple relationships depicted in Cicero and Gregory are closer analogues to More's *Dialogue of Comfort*.

III

The settings of these three works are each a place of leisure, where deeper questions can be probed. Cicero's dialogues are set at his country villa at Tusculum outside the city of Rome. Gregory is not at the

monastery which he founded in his family home on the Caelian Hill but in "a quiet spot" (Prologue 1, p. 3) in Rome, perhaps a room in the Lateran Palace, his papal home. More's dialogue is set in Antony's sickroom within the city of Buda in Hungary.

The traditional title of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* tells much about the ambience of this dialogue. Cicero's favorite villa was located at Tusculum, about ten miles south-east of Rome near modern Frascati.[25] Among the amentities of his country house were two gymnasia, the upper called the "Lyceum" after Aristotle's school of philosophy[26] and the lower called the "Academy" after Plato's (2.3.9). One wonders why the upper gymnasium was named for Aristotle and not Plato since Cicero declares that Aristotle "far excels everyone—always with the exception of Plato" (1.10.22). At least, Cicero indicates his preference for Plato by setting all five books of discussion in the "Academy."

Gregory's *Dialogues* take place in some generalized locale within Rome. Although the immediate setting is not described, Gregory provides numerous descriptions of rural life in his first three books and several allusions to churches in Rome in his fourth book. Like biblical narratives, Gregory's miracles are intended to be expounded for moral lessons, yet they also offer illuminating glimpses of economic arrangements and anthropological rituals in sixth-century Italy.

In his triad Gregory gives us a series of eclogues and georgics. It is not surprising that contemplative monks would have the solitude necessary for pastoring sheep (3.22, p. 154), but even a subdeacon with responsibilities for the social welfare of the local church watches his own flock (3.17, p. 145). The agricultural setting offers Gregory occasion for constructing analogues of biblical miracles. When his cellarer refused to give away the monastery's last flask of oil to a poor man, the prayers of St. Benedict filled an empty oil-cask to overflowing in imitation of Elias (1 Kings 17:7–16) and Eliseus (2 Kings 4:1–7) (2.29, p. 97).[27] A primitive fertility rite was performed by seven naked women dancing in a monastery garden near Subiaco (2.8, p. 71). These vignettes succinctly depict the rural world of late antiquity.

As the Acts of the Apostles conclude with Paul's arrival in the imperial capital (Chap. 28), so too the last book of Gregory's *Dialogues* ends at Rome. The noblewoman Galla (4.14, p. 206) led a saintly life in a monastery near the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter's, where the humble shoemaker Deusdedit gave his surplus away every Saturday to the poor (4.38, p. 242). Three holy women led a monastic life in their home near Saint Mary Major's (4.16, p. 208), while the paralytic Servulus devoted himself to prayer in his home near St. Clement's

and the Coliseum (4.15, p. 207). Thus countryfolk and city-dwellers both continued the tradition of holy lives and deaths established by the apostolic martyrs Peter and Paul.

Because the fictional setting of *A Dialogue of Comfort* is a sickroom in Buda, More avoids the problem of describing an unfamiliar city. Yet he was not unfamiliar with the Hungarian political situation. Frank Manley writes that More, as unofficial personal secretary to Henry VIII, had been privy to the diplomatic correspondence about the Turkish conquest of Buda in 1526 (*CW* 12:cxxv–vi). This distant setting was not chosen simply as a ploy to move the scene of action as far away from England as possible. Enduring mental suffering on the Western edge of Christendom, More empathized with his fellow Catholics persecuted on the Eastern edge of the Empire.

Although the generalized setting of More's dialogue is Buda, reminiscences of Tudor London add realistic details to the scene. More's New Building, which he had constructed on his estate in Chelsea, was a model retreat for prayer and study. Antony recommends such a hermitage as a place for the tempted Christian to pray, "Let him also choose himself some secret solitary place in his own house, as far fro noise and company as he conveniently can, and thither let him sometime secretly resort alone" (p. 167, *CW* 12:164). Antony's reference to the maze with hell in the center (p. 171, *CW* 12:167) recalls the maze at Hampton Court. Antony's admiration of the Carthusians and the Brigittines (p. 283, *CW* 12:276) recalls the London Charterhouse and the Brigittine monastery of Syon, which produced More's fellow martyrs. Antony's sickroom in Buda is as little confining as is More's cell in the Tower.

IV

Not only does each author indicate a specific place, but he gives some reference to the passage of time as the conversation unfolds. Cicero imagines the dialogue taking place on five different days with one book of discussion per day. Gregory depicts the exchange occurring in three meetings with an intermission for rest occurring after Books I (1.12, p. 53) and II (2.38, p. 110). More's dialogue supposedly takes place on three occasions: Book I, on an unspecified day; Book II, a few days later before dinner; Book III after dinner when Antony has awakened from a nap and Vincent completed an errand (pp. 190–91, *CW* 12:187). Perhaps Books II and III are set on the same day because

their material is closely connected. In Book II More analyzes three temptations found allegorically in Psalm 90 (91), vv. 5–6a; in Book III he develops the fourth temptation found in v. 6b. This passage of time is necessary to accommodate the interlocutors to the hard truths they face.

There are few references to fictional time in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* besides the general proposal that the interlocutors spend their mornings in rhetorical exercises and their afternoons in philosophical discussions (2.3.9). Cicero alludes to this time element after his address to Brutus at the beginning of each book. At the end of the second day, he wittily promises to meet on the morrow to "practise declamation by the water-clock" (2.27.67). Appropriately, all five days' discussion is recalled at the conclusion of the work (5.42.121). References to Cicero's political contemporaries add particularities to the dimension of time. Crassus' death in the Parthian campaign of 53 BC (1.6.12), Pompey's assassination after his defeat at Pharsalus in 48 BC (1.6.12) and the survival of the dictator Julius Caesar (1.36.88), all depict the troubled background which makes the discussion of equanimity in the face of death a timely topic for philosophical inquiry.

If Cicero knew that the Roman Republic had been replaced by a dictatorship, Gregory believed that the end of the world was approaching. Specific references to events in Rome indicate that Gregory's *Dialogues* were composed in the interval between July 583 and November 594.[28] The four horsemen of the Apocalypse can be used to categorize the trials from which Italy suffered during the fifth and sixth centuries. Most obvious are the onslaughts of the various barbarian tribes, represented by the white horse (Revel. 6:2) whose rider went "from victory to victory" and the red horse (Revel. 6:4) whose rider carried "a huge sword." A hermit's vision witnesses the damnation of Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, whose harsh imprisonment of Pope John I had led to his death in 526 (4.31, p.228). Shortly before the Lombard invasion in 568, a martyr appears in a vision to Bishop Redemptus, announcing three times "The end of all flesh has come!" (3.38, p. 186). These successive waves of invasion are not the only disasters. The black horse of famine (Revel. 6:5) ravaged Italy in 537–38 (2.21, p. 88 and n. 47). The flooding of the Tiber in 589 (3.19, p. 149) called forth the "deathly pale" horse of plague (Revel. 6:8) which wasted Rome the next year (4.37, p. 239). These events confirmed Gregory's apocalyptic view of his age.

The general time of More's *Dialogue of Comfort* is the two and a half years between the fall of 1526 and the spring of 1529; the particular

fictional time is approximately one week within this period. On August 29, 1526 the Turkish army under Suleiman the Magnificent had decimated the Hungarians at the battle of Mohács. On September 9, Suleiman entered Buda and killed everyone over the ages of 13 or 14 (*CW* 12:cxxv–vii). In the spring of 1529 Suleiman invaded Hungary again and accepted as a vassal John Zapolya, the rebel leader who had kept his troops in reserve during the battle of Mohács. Hungary was then divided into areas of Christian and Moslem control, but this political compromise could not be accepted as a theological position by Antony and Vincent. Although Gregory's Rome was spared pillage by the Lombards, the political storm that raged outside Cicero's villa and Antony's sickroom would eventually engulf the ex-consul and the two Hungarians.

V

Within each of these books written in a time of crisis there are two interlocutors. Cicero calls his speakers simply "M." and "A.", probably representing "Magister" and "Adolescens."[29] Pope Gregory converses with Peter the Deacon, who has a filial relationship to him. More creates the characters of the elderly Antony and his nephew Vincent. Of Cicero's two speakers, indicated simply by the letters "M." and "A.", Rockwood notes that "So far as can be determined by manuscript authority, the letters were not in the original text, but were inserted by a copyist."[30] "M." stands for "Marcus," Cicero's personal name or for *magister* ("teacher"). "A." stands for *adolescens* as in the phrase of direct address, *At tu, adolescens* (2.12.28) or for *auditor* as indicated in the clause, *qui audire vellet* ("who would wish to hear") (1.4.8).

While "A." is a rather neutral interlocutor, "M." is an historical personality. He obviously represents Cicero himself, as we can conclude from numerous references to his earlier political career, present political inactivity, paternal grief for Tullia and other writings. The earliest public office that Cicero held was the quaestorship in 75 BC. During his year in Sicily, he had discovered the forgotten tomb of Archimedes the geometrician. For Cicero the moral value of the scientist's life outshines that of the tyrannical ruler, Dionysius the Elder (5.23.64–66). Recalling his most important political achievement, Cicero asserts that he did not act in anger when he had Catiline and his fellow conspirators executed without benefit of trial (4.23.51–52). Rejecting popular acclaim as ephemeral (5.36.104), Cicero remembers his exile following

this emergency intervention and his forced retirement after the rise of the First Triumvirate. Now a private citizen, the elder statesman serves his country by making the treasures of Greek philosophy accessible in Latin.

Plato's belief in the immortality of the soul became a personal consideration for Cicero after the death of his daughter Tullia. Five times he recalls the *Consolatio*, which he wrote to assuage his grief. In addition to this now lost essay, Cicero mentions three of his dialogues, the lost *Hortensius*, the *Academica* and the *De Re Publica*. Writing the *Tusculan Disputations* within the year after Tullia's death and during the dictatorship of Julius Caesar, Cicero exclaims, "I have been robbed of the consolations of family life and the distinctions of a public career" (1.34.84). Cicero acknowledges his emotional vulnerability (5.1.4) while striving manfully to feel that virtue is sufficient for a happy life (5.1.1).

Much less vividly rendered than "M.," "A." keeps the *Tusculan Disputations* from being purely expository. In Book I "A." speaks on eight occasions, in Book II, on seven. In Books III and IV he speaks only three times each; the dramatic interest in Book III arises from "M.'s" three apostrophes to the philosopher Epicurus (3.16.35, 3.17.37, 3.18.41) and from the imagined address of the more revered Pythagoras and Plato to Cicero (3.17.36). The character of "A." achieves greater prominence in Book V where he speaks up six times, even with wit and a touch of impudence. When "M." asserts that the virtuous man can be happy even in prison, "A." objects that "M.'s" arguments are hackneyed (*pervulgata*) (5.5.13) and not persuasive. "A." playfully raises objections by quoting Cicero's friend Brutus (5.8.21) and Cicero's own *De Finibus* (5.11.32) against "M.'s" distinctions between goods and advantages. Except for this surge of individuality in the last book of the *Tusculan Disputations*, "A." represents a generalized listener to "M.'s" philosophical lectures.

Like Cicero, Gregory puts himself into his dialogue *in propria persona*. His earlier life was shaped by the wealth received from his patrician father (4.36, p. 234) and the example given by his monastic aunts (4.17, p. 211). His admiration for St. Benedict, who adopted the eremetical life in youth (2.1, p. 56), stands in silent contrast to Gregory, who did not adopt the monastic life until 574, when he was in his middle thirties.[31] Having left a secular career as Prefect of Rome to follow a contemplative life, Gregory was called back to active service as papal nuncio at Constantinople (3.36, p. 177). His election to the papacy in 590 gave him a special consciousness of its dignity. He mentions six popes of the preceding century, including his grandfather Fe-

lix III (4.17, p. 211), "whom by the grace of God I had the honor to succeed to the throne of Peter here in Rome" (3.3, p. 116).

In spite of his increased administrative duties, the pope does not neglect the office of teaching. Although his temporal and spiritual responsibilities leave him "deeply dejected" (Prologue 1, p. 3), Gregory becomes confidently magisterial once he begins to converse with Peter. Vogüé describes their exchange as a liturgical ritual, "Le pontife, assisté de son diacre, exerce imperturbablement sa fonction doctrinale. Jamais il n'apprend, jamais il n'est pris en défaut, jamais il n'hésite."[32] To reinforce his instruction of Peter, Gregory makes five specific references to his *Homilies on the Gospel* preached to the people of Rome. Gregory is the most imposing of the three mentors by reason of his ascetic discipline and pontifical authority.

Like Pope Gregory I, Peter the Deacon is a historical rather than a fictional person. Vogüé has traced his service in administering church property from Ravenna (Ep. 6.24), to Sicily (Ep. 1.1 and 3), to Campagna (Ep. 3.1) and finally to Rome (Ep. 3.56).[33] A capable manager in real life, within the *Dialogues* Peter is Gregory's spiritual son, "dear friend" and "companion in the study of sacred Scripture" (Prologue 1, p. 3). Vogüé has counted Peter's interventions in each book: 31 in Book I, 28 in Book II, 39 in Book III and 47 in Book IV.[34] Peter's initiatives can be straightforward expressions of the proper emotional reaction to Gregory's miracle-stories: tears (3.1, p. 115), "fear and hope" (3.7, p. 123), "awe and wonder" (3.32, p. 169). Sometimes Peter's reactions are mistaken. When he declares that raising the dead to life is the greatest miracle, Gregory counters that converting a sinner is greater (3.17, pp. 146–47). Sometimes Peter's questions afford Gregory the opportunity to expound a central idea. When he asks how St. Benedict lived "with himself," Gregory explains, "By searching continually into his own soul he always beheld himself in the presence of his Creator" (2.3, pp. 62–63).

Like Cicero's "A." and More's Vincent, Gregory's disciple becomes more self-assured and articulate as the dialogue progresses. Thus Peter argues more vigorously with Gregory in the last, most abstract book of the *Dialogues*. He resists the argument from the soul's activity after death because "the mind rebels at believing what it cannot see with bodily eyes" (4.5, p. 198). He questions the presence of physical fire in hell (4.30, p. 226) and queries the justice of punishing finite sins with eternal pains (4.46, p. 255). In the end, however, Gregory wins perfect acquiescence as Peter declares: "I am pleased with your answer" (4.25, p. 217); "I agree with what you say" (4.26, p. 219); "I have no more questions to ask" (4.39, p. 244). Respectful of Gregory's office, Peter the Deacon maintains a more formal relationship with his mentor than either Cicero's "A." or More's Vincent.

About the time of his first marriage, More had translated into English the life of Pico della Mirandola written by the Italian humanist's nephew, Gianfrancesco. Thirty years later, More depicts in Antony another uncle whose piety inspires the literary production of his nephew.[35] Probably named after St. Antony Abbot, a centenarian when he died, this Antony is also a venerable patriarch. Born shortly before the fall of Athens in 1452 and of Constantinople in 1453, he was imprisoned by the Turks twice during the period of 1470–1490 (*CW* 12:336 and 332). In his comprehensive essay, "Here I Sit," Marc'hadour notes that Antony is old enough to be More's father.[36] The senior More (1451–1530) was nearly 80 years old when he died, while Antony is at least in his middle seventies. His patron saint had hoped to be martyred during the persecution of 311 when he left his desert solitude to bring food and comfort to imprisoned Christians.[37] Although he was not arrested, the Egyptian hermit could claim to be a martyr in desire. The Hungarian Antony is at least willing to die for his faith even if the Turks should break into his sickroom (p. 321, *CW* 12:315).

Confined to his bed, Antony reminiscences about his earlier life. Like Shakespeare's Theseus, he knows that "in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear! (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.21–22). During his soldiering days, scouts for the Hungarian troops once mistook a hedge for the approaching Turkish army (pp. 113–14, *CW* 12:109–10). In his middle age Antony, like More, had suffered from a tertian fever that made him feel simultaneously hot and cold. Thus can the Christian under tribulation experience both pain and consolation from God (p. 91, *CW* 12:88). Now in his old age Antony's life flickers like a burnt-down candle (p. 89, *CW* 12:85). He occasionally suffers from memory lapse in the midst of his narrative (p. 93, *CW* 12:90). But his sense of humor never fails him, and he confesses himself to be "even half a giglet [jokester] and more" (p. 86, *CW* 12:83). Remembering the characteristic humor of the author, we find here a witty pun on his own name, "half a giglet and More."

The name of Antony's nephew Vincent comes from the Latin verb *vincere*, meaning "to conquer." Antony's arguments are so cogent we can be assured that, in the end, Vincent will overcome his fears and become a martyr if need be. While Antony is as old as More's father, Vincent is the same age as More's son John (1508–1547). At the time

when this dialogue was composed, the junior More was about 26 or 27 years old. Then married for half a dozen years, he was a young householder such as Vincent describes himself to be (p. 207, *CW* 12:202). Like Gregory's deacon, Vincent faces a violent death at the hands of marauding invaders. As nephew to Antony, he resembles Gianfrancesco Pico, who helped spread the teachings of his uncle.

It has been suggested that the younger Hungarian is named for St. Vincent of Lérins, who articulated the famous definition of orthodoxy, "Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est."[38] While this link to a defender of the faith is appropriate, there is an earlier Vincent, martyred in Saragossa in AD 304. A deacon like Stephen and Lawrence, with whom he is joined in the Litany of the Saints, this Vincent was arrested with his bishop Valerius. The elderly churchman was exiled, but the younger was racked, torn with iron hooks and burnt on a grill. When his executioners tried to dispose of his corpse by throwing it into the sea, it was cast up on the shore and given a honorable burial by devout Christians. Augustine commemorates this martyr in four sermons, punning on the name in his inimitable style, "Vicit in verbis, vicit in poenis; ... vicit exustus ignibus, vicit submersus fluctibus; postremo vicit tortus, vicit mortuus."[39] The Spanish poet Prudentius celebrated his fellow countryman in a lengthy hymn in which the saint fearlessly defies his pagan judge and torturers.[40] Both these authors are quoted in the *Legenda Aurea* for the feast of January 22. The separate judgments for Bishop Valerius and Vincent the Deacon are analogous to the probable fates of the two Hungarians. Arguably, the aged Antony will die a natural death, but the youthful Vincent will be martyred.

Vincent's character is not so fully portrayed as Antony's, but certain details are given. In Book I Vincent regards Antony as more like a father than an uncle (p. 4, *CW* 12:4); therefore, he is especially considerate of Antony's age and poor health (pp. 66, 79, *CW* 12:64, 77). This same concern is shown at the end of Book II (p. 190, *CW* 12:186) when Vincent welcomes the arrival of Antony's dinner. Like the celebrants of Erasmus' "Godly Feast," Vincent seeks counsel from another layman, not from a priest. In Book II Vincent reports a sermon he had heard in Reformation Saxony, wittily exaggerating its opposition to justification by works (p. 97, *CW* 12:94).

Just as Peter the Deacon temporarily adopts the role of a weak Christian fearing the Lombards (4.4, p. 196), so Vincent pretends to be a wealthy Christian lord facing the Turks (pp. 235–43, *CW* 12:229–37). Recovering his courage, Vincent grows in independence as the dialogue unfolds. When Antony argues that the whole world is a prison, Vincent protests against his "sophistical fantasy" (p. 269, *CW* 12:262). All in all, Vincent makes five objections to Antony's arguments in Book I and four each in Books II and III. While not contentious, their verbal exchange reveals that *A Dialogue of Comfort* was written by a lawyer and that it does have a firm logical substratum.

Antony addresses Vincent by his Christian name for the first time in Book II, that is, about 40% through the book (pp. 127, 141, *CW* 12:123, 136). Since Vincent is becoming more autonomous, he is more worthy of being addressed by his proper name. In Book III Antony uses this proper name six times, a sign that Vincent has now found his true spiritual identity. At the end of Book III Vincent takes the initiative for writing their conversation down so he can recall Antony's counsel later and in turn share it with others (p. 326, *CW* 12:320). Because of his wit, Antony is the most humanly appealing of the three mentors, while among the three disciples Vincent has achieved the most self-direction.

VI

To a literary critic the fictional elements of the three dialogues are most revealing, but to a moral philosopher the contents are most significant. Each book of the *Tusculan Disputations* discusses a major theme: 1) death, 2) physical pain, 3) psychological distress, 4) the remaining disorders of the soul and 5) the principle that virtue is of itself sufficient for leading a happy life. Gregory's *Dialogues* are not so logical or thematic in their presentation as they are narrative and anecdotal. Book I discusses the Italian saints of the sixth century, Gregory's near contemporaries; Book II, the monastic patriarch St. Benedict (ca. 480–543); Book III, saints of the more distant past, such as St. Paulinus of Nola (354?–431). With its discourse on the soul's existence after death, Book IV is the most philosophical. In More's *Dialogue of Comfort* Book I defines tribulation in terms of its sources. Book II further examines three kinds of tribulation, while Book III discusses the worst type, open persecution. Although Cicero did not share the assured religious belief of Gregory and More, all three authors maintain their moral integrity in the face of death and affirm their hope in a blessed hereafter.

Because his dialogue is a philosophical investigation and not religious instruction, Cicero will try, not always successfully, to conceal

his personal opinion (5.4.11). Four times he rejects the philosophy of Epicurus, who prefers the body to the soul and pleasure to virtue. He is more approving of the Peripatetics, although he considers that their doctrine of the golden mean (3.10.22) countenances limited disorders in the realm of feelings (4.17.38). He does not urge emotional insensibility (3.6.12), but adopts the Stoic position that the wise man is always happy. Gregory and More agree with Cicero on the relativity of pain and death. The Roman pontiff also urges emotional sobriety, even for children (4.18, p. 212), but the Englishman finds room for merry tales in a study of tribulation.

Referring frequently to the ideas of the Peripatetics, Academics and Stoics, Cicero makes direct quotations only from the texts of Plato. Like the exterior walls of a Roman basilica, Books I and V contain the weightiest themes of the *Tusculan Disputations*: 1) that death is not an evil, 5) that virtue is sufficient for leading a happy life. Book I repeats the lengthy argument for the immortality of the soul found in the *Phaedrus* 245 (1.23.53–54) and Socrates's address to his judges (1.41.97–99) quoted in the *Apology* 40C. Book V recounts Socrates's doubt that the oppressive kings of Persia and Macedon are happy (*Gorgias* 470D, E) (5.12.35) and his affirmation that the happy life rests on virtue alone (*Menexenus* 247E) (5.12.36). Superb orator that he is, Cicero positions his most important material at the beginning and end of his discourse.

Like the window-filled clerestory of a Roman basilica, the middle books are distinguished by numerous literary allusions which illuminate Cicero's philosophical principles. Among the Greek authors Euripides (fragments of four lost plays and *Orestes*, 11.1–3) and the *Iliad* (9.646–47, 4.201–2, 19.226–29) are quoted more frequently,[41] but Sophocles and Aeschylus are quoted at greater length. The wild exclamations of Hercules in his mortal agony (*Trachiniae* 1046 ff.) (2.8.20–2.9.22) are contrasted with the sober assessment by Prometheus of his eternal torment (from the lost *Prometheus Unbound*) (2.10.23–25). With pleasant irony the author includes the long selections from Sophocles and Aeschylus and another from Ennius (2.16.38–2.17.39) in the very book where "M." agrees with Plato that poets should be banished from the ideal commonwealth (cf. *Republic* 2.398A) (2.11.27).

In addition to these literary allusions, Cicero gives exempla from ancient history. Even though condemned unjustly, Theramenes showed that he did not fear death when he toasted the health of his enemy with the cup of hemlock (1.40.96). Marius courageously underwent surgery for varicose veins without an anesthetic and without being

tied down (2.22.53). The political danger of the tyrant Dionysius, who banqueted under the sword of Damocles (5.21.61–62), proves that virtue is necessary to happiness. Though more serious in tone, Cicero's moral illustrations provide the reader with the same respite from intellectual concentration as More's merry tales.

The major theme of Gregory's *Dialogues* is the continuing power of God demonstrated through the outward miracles and inward holiness of the saints. This topic is not easily isolated from the more than 200 miracles which Gregory relates. Vogüé counts ca. 45 each in Books I and II, ca. 70 in Book III and ca. 50 in Book IV.[42] The high number of exempla is soon taken as normative for each book. In Book IV, which begins as a more theoretical defense of the immortality of the soul, the reader is not surprised when the discussion returns to the anecdotal level. Vogüé offers a pictorial image to organize this multiplicity of miracles. Book II with its single figure of St. Benedict is like the central section of a triptych, flanked by two panels of grouped saints, twelve in Book I, thirty in Book III.[43] Like a tableau of the Last Judgment, Book IV crowns the other three books as it epitomizes the goal toward which they tend.[44]

Perhaps the most effective method for interpreting Gregory's *Dialogues* is to skim the miracle stories but to scrutinize the pontiff's brief exegesis of the moral. Early in Book I, Gregory enunciates his basic principle: "The soul that is really filled with the Spirit of God will easily be recognized by its miraculous powers and humility" (1.1, p. 8). For Gregory, a miracle is a quasi-sacrament in which the outward sign indicates an inward grace in the human agent. It usually causes a recognition of God's power in Arian witnesses or an increase of devotion in Catholic ones. The virtues which these saints demonstrate are primarily contempt for the world and humility before God's power at work in them. Gregory teaches an exalted ideal of piety but in a much simpler mode than either Cicero or More.

Although Gregory's exempla are by no means confined to incidents connected with the Lombard invasion, we will focus on these as most related to the theme of public persecution. Out of approximately 24 stories involving conflicts between Arians and Catholics, the latter suffer imprisonment or death in only seven incidents. Otherwise, the monks of Monte Cassino are saved from death through the prayers of St. Benedict (2.17, p. 86); the executioner cannot strike off the head of the priest Sanctulus who substituted himself for a captured deacon (3.37, p. 182); Bishop Cassius cures the sword-bearer of the Gothic King Totila (3.6, p. 120). The fundamental virtues of prayerfulness,

love of neighbor and forgiveness of enemies illuminate these exemplary tales.

As Cicero is inspired by the philosophy of Plato, and Gregory by the example of St. Benedict, so More derives his spiritual teaching from patristic and medieval theology as well as from independent reflection. The first third of the *Dialogue of Comfort* reads like a categorization of typical human experience. In Book I Antony defines "tribulation" as "a kind of grief, either pain of the body or heaviness of the mind" (p. 10, *CW* 12:10). Next, he divides the topic into three kinds of tribulations: 1) those stemming from our own fault, 2) those coming from other people or events, 3) those sent directly from God to test our patience. In Book II Antony modifies this threefold division. Difficulties that are brought on by our own fault become those that are willingly chosen; those not brought on by our own fault become those willingly endured; those sent to us directly from God become those that cannot be avoided. Later in Book II, Antony subdivides the genus of tribulation into the ordinary distress of temptation and the grievous affliction of persecution.

The final two-thirds of More's dialogue describe four types of persecution based on a traditional exegesis of Psalm 90 (91), vv. 5–6. The fear of the night (v. 5a) is tribulation when the cause is dark and unknown. More derives his treatment of the elements of fear from Bernard's Commentary on Psalm 90 (*PL* 183.197) and of mental confusion from earlier commentaries by Jerome (*PL* 26.1099) and Augustine (*PL* 37.1153–54). Jean Gerson contributes a method for discerning the source and goal of one's inspirations.[45] The arrow flying in the day (v. 5b) is pride in worldly prosperity, More's original exegetical contribution (*CW* 12:398). Again following Bernard (*PL* 183.198), More interprets business walking in the darkness (v. 6a) as worldly prosperity before the dawn of our conversion or after the sunset of our rejection of God's grace. In Book III More concurs with Augustine (*PL* 37.1153–56) in defining the noonday devil (v. 6b) as open persecution. Thus More's themes are derived from Scripture and traditional Catholic theology (cf. *CW* 12:379, 380, 398, 413), while his exempla are drawn from folklore and personal experience.

At the beginning of Book II, the merry interlude in More's Tudor drama, Vincent raises the issue, "Whether a man may not in tribulation use some worldly recreation for his comfort" (p. 85, *CW* 12:82). Antony answers in the affirmative, appropriately so because Book II is the most humorous of the three books. Throughout the whole work Vincent recounts three merry tales, but Antony tells fourteen.

Some of Antony's best tales are animal fables, purportedly taken from Aesop. Two describe the Christians of Hungary threatened by Suleiman, the wolf (p. 193, *CW* 12:189) or the dog which steals the bone fought over by two other dogs, Ferdinand I and John Zapolya (p. 8, *CW* 12:8). One fable minimizes the rumors of persecution when the lion's roar turns out to come from an ass (p. 114, *CW* 12:111). Another reverses the Utopian attitude toward capitalism, the hen that laid the golden egg of employment for the working class (p. 184, *CW* 12:181). The last two refer perhaps to the English scene. Is More the snail that refused to leave his house to attend the wedding feast of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn (p. 292, *CW* 12:285)? Are More and Fisher the two deer that fear the yelping of the ill-tempered bitch (pp. 300–301, *CW* 12:294–95)? By reducing these problematic human situations to animal tales, More humorously gains control over his anxiety.

Besides these animal fables, of which there are six, five other merry tales have been identified as referring to More's indomitable wife, Dame Alice. A sixth refers to a timorous housemaid whose mistress was "a very wise woman (which is in women very rare), very mild also and meek" (p. 116, *CW* 12:113). Could this forebearing homemaker be Dame Alice? Perhaps. Whereas she might feel the need to assert her domestic capabilities against her husband's political and literary achievements, she could afford to be more accommodating with subordinates. With their Roman sobriety, neither Cicero nor Gregory can compare with the affirmative humor of More.

VII

Having examined the morphological features which all three dialogues share, we will make some general conclusions about the resemblances between More and his two predecessors. Besides the references to the *Tusculan Disputations* noted by the Yale commentary, the *Dialogue of Comfort* also examines Cicero's themes of integrity, tribulation, suicide, and death in general. While spurring his audience on to achievement in public life, Cicero distinguishes between popular acclaim and true honor:

> [T]o my mind all things seem more praiseworthy which are done without glorification and without publicity, not that this is to be avoided—for all things done well tend to be set in the light

> of day—but all the same there is no audience for virtue of higher authority than the approval of conscience. (2.26.64)

In rejecting the Royal Supremacy, the ex-chancellor differed with most of his English contemporaries. Yet, as he told Margaret when she visited him in the Tower, More clung to the minority position approved by his conscience:

> [S]ith this conscience is sure for me, I verelie trust in God, he shall rather strenght [sic] me to bere the losse [of all worldly goods], than against this conscience to swere and put my soule in peryll, sith all the causes that I perceyue moue other men to the contrary, seme not such vnto me, as in my conscience make any chaunge.[46]

Thus the Roman and the Tudor statesmen both maintain their personal integrity in extreme political situations.

In discussing the means of alleviating distress, Cicero lists the method that a comforter may use. He may deny that any evil exists or say that the evil is not serious. He may attempt to turn the sufferer's attention away from evil to focus on the good. He may say that the evil is not upsetting because it was unforeseen or deny that we have an obligation to grieve. Finally, the comforter may try all of the above, as Cicero did in writing the *Consolatio* immediately after Tullia's death (3.31.76).

Faced with the demand to renounce his basic religious commitment, More could not deny the option of evil or say that it was not serious since he believed that his choice meant either damnation or salvation. He could agree with Cicero's comforter that nothing unforeseen had happened to him. Roper later recounts how More tried to strengthen the family before his arrest by telling them stories of the patience of martyrs "that when he after fell into the trouble indeede, his trouble to them was a greate deale the lesse."[47] Since More maintains an attitude of Christian hope, the emotional tone of the Tower Works is cheerful, even impersonal. The *Dialogue of Comfort*, especially Book II, is remarkable for the number of merry tales and grim jokes that it contains, some even on the topic of suicide.

Both Cicero and More raise the possibility of suicide as a way out of an intolerable situation. Cicero admired Cato's reaction to his defeat by Julius Caesar at Thapsus in 46 BC. After reading Plato's *Phaedo* throughout the night, the republican committed suicide at dawn "with a feeling of joy in having found a reason for death" (1.30.74). His scorn

for adversity proves to Cicero that human virtue does indeed exist (5.1.4). Antony disagrees, referring to Augustine's judgment in *The City of God* (1:23, *PL* 41.36–37) that Cato's suicide was "but plain pusillanimity and impotency of stomach [spirit]" (p. 134, *CW* 12:130). Although Cicero approved of suicide as an escape from disgrace, he refrained from taking his own life after his banishment in 58 BC, due to consideration for his family.[48]

Entrusted with responsibility for the whole Church, Pope Gregory never considers the possibility of suicide, but More devotes a long section to it in Book II of the *Dialogue of Comfort*. Three examples of gallows humor explore this theme: a nagging wife goads her husband into beheading her (pp. 128–31, *CW* 12:124–127); a Viennese widow tries to bribe a neighbor to behead her so she will be canonized (pp. 131–33, *CW* 12:127–29); a man entreats his wife to crucify him in an attempt to follow Christ too literally (pp. 147–48, *CW* 12:143–44). More describes the second case so graphically that it seems he is mentally rehearsing his own death. Pretending to comply with the widow's wish, her neighbor

> made her lie down and took up the ax in his own hand, and with the tother hand he felt the edge and found a fault that it was not sharp, and that therefore he would in no wise do it till he had grounden it sharper. He could not else, he said, for pity, it would put her to so much pain. (p. 132, *CW* 12:128)

Equally probable in a life-threatening situation is the recurrence of obsessional thoughts about suicide:

> Some have, with holding a knife in their hand, suddenly thought upon the killing of themself, and forthwith in devising what an horrible thing it were, if they should mishap so to do, have fallen in a fear that they should so do indeed, and have with long and often thinking thereon imprinted that fear so sore in their imagination, that some of them have not after cast it off without great difficulty, and some could never in their life be rid thereof, but have after in conclusion miserable done it indeed. (p. 154, *CW* 12:150–51)

Although Walter M. Gordon rejects the inference that More was personally tempted to commit suicide,[49] his extensive treatment of this topic seems to suggest otherwise. How hard it must have been to reject pathological depression during the fifteen months of isolation in the Tower. Perhaps More was tempted to do actual physical violence

to himself; at least, he could fear that his resistance to the king was an indirect form of self-destruction.

While Cicero could not foresee the exact circumstances of his death, he realized that it was a dangerous course to champion the traditional Roman values of political freedom in an era of dictatorship. Because they contain no mention of Julius Caesar's assassination, the *Tusculan Disputations* were presumably written before the famous Ides of March.[50] Four explicit references to the opposition between the despotic Tarquin and Lucius Junius Brutus suggest that Cicero was subtly urging the current Brutus to eliminate the contemporary Tarquin.[51] But the murder of Julius Caesar did not restore the Republic. In retaliation for Cicero's Philippics, Marc Antony demanded his execution in the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate. When Cicero saw his assassins approach, he ordered his slaves to set down his litter. Then he thrust his head out the window to give their swords an unobstructed swath. Cicero's praise of the defeated gladiator unwittingly foretells the manner of his own death, "Who after falling has drawn in his neck when ordered to suffer the fatal stroke?" (2.17.41).[52] The exercise of writing philosophical works in the penultimate year of his life enabled Cicero to die with dignified courage and thus illustrate the dictum of his master Plato, "For the whole life of the philosopher . . . is a preparation for death" (*Phaedo* 67D, quoted in 1.30.74). Not an admirer of the Stoics like Cicero, More allows an emotional response to the human condition. Yet both statesmen follow their consciences in spite of tribulation and death.

Writing about religious persecution, the two Catholic authors also discuss the themes of tribulation and death. Gregory's *Dialogues* allude to the sufferings inflicted by the Ostrogoths in Italy (e.g., 2.14, p. 79), the Visigoths in Spain (3.31, p. 168) and the Vandals in North Africa (e.g., 3.1, p. 111). The Roman pontiff particularly recalls the devastation caused during the Lombard invasion of Italy a generation before in AD 568:

> Cities were sacked, fortifications overthrown, churches burned, monasteries and cloisters destroyed. Farms were abandoned, and the countryside, uncultivated, became a wilderness. The land was no longer occupied by its owners, and wild beasts roamed the fields where so many people had once made their homes.(3.38, p. 186)

Nearly a millennium later, Antony describes the harsh treatment of faithful Christians in Greece and Macedonia, which had been conquered by the Turks in the mid-fifteenth century:

> For lands, he suffereth them to have none of their own; office or honest room they bear none. With occasions of his wars he pilleth them with taxes and tallages unto the bare bones. Their children he . . . taketh . . . fro their parents, conveying them whither he list, where their friends never see them after.
> (p. 195, *CW* 12:191)

The Turks thus tried to pressure Christians into renouncing their faith when they did not slay them outright.

Just as Gregory and More describe comparable situations of persecution, so they have similar understandings of laying down one's life for Christ. Gregory discusses two kinds of martyrdom, the public and the secret (3.26, pp. 160–61). The first is a literal dying for one's faith, but the second is a hidden renunciation of selfishness in the daily events of life. More understands analogously that tribulation can be of two kinds, physical and psychological:

> [S]ith tribulation is not only such pains as pain the body, but every trouble also that grieveth the mind, . . . the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh soliciting the mind of a good man to sin . . . [are] a great inward trouble and secret grief in his heart[.] (pp. 52–53, *CW* 12:51)

In particular, More would have known the mental suffering of a judge who would not render a false judgement in behalf of the powerful (pp. 35–36, *CW* 12:34). Yet as Antony's very last quotation from Scripture affirms, "The sufferings of this life are not to be compared with the future glory which will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).
(cf. p. 325, *CW* 12:319)

One of the most striking resemblances between the dialogues of Gregory and More is the way in which both authors rework Plato's Parable of the Cave (*Republic* 7:514 ff.). Plato uses this allegory of prisoners in a dark cave lacking knowledge of the daylit world to explain how the ordinary person can scarcely conceive of such abstractions as Ideal Forms. Gregory describes how a little boy, born in prison, cannot believe his mother's description of the beauties of the outside world:

> So it is with men born into the darkness of this earthly exile. They hear about lofty and invisible things, but hesitate to believe in them, because they know only the lowly, visible things of earth into which they were born. (4.1, p. 190)

The reader with even a modest acquaintance with Plato will interpret Gregory's parable as an adaptation of the Allegory of the Cave. Even though he lived six years at the Byzantine court, however, Gregory confesses that he did not know Greek.[53] Vogüé cites a possible Latin source for Plato's allegory in Cicero's *De natura deorum* (2.37), but it is a luxurious subterranean land. Vogüé also refers to St. Gregory of Nyssa's comparison of our mortal life to incarceration in his "De mortuis" (PG 46.505–8), but this sermon is another Greek text.[54] The motif of imprisonment is a recurrent one in the psalms and the prophets; for example, Yahweh addresses the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42:6–7: "I have appointed you . . . to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon." Thus Gregory could have shaped his parable from scriptural material. Furthermore, Boethius describes death as freeing the soul "from this earthly prison" in his *Consolation of Philosophy* (Book 2, Prose 7).[55] Although Gregory never mentions the author of *The Consolation of Philosophy* in his *Dialogues*, the pope does mention Boethius' father-in-law Symmachus, who was also executed by Theodoric (4.31, p. 228). Another possible source for Gregory's knowledge of Plato is oral tradition as posited by Joan M. Petersen.[56]

More, of course, knew Plato's *Republic* thoroughly, as his own ideal commonwealth testifies. Although he does not compare earthly life to a prison, Raphael explains the Utopians' view of death as an entrance into greater freedom, which "like all other good things, they conjecture to be increased after death rather than diminished in all good men" (*CW* 4:225). In the *Dialogue of Comfort*, More imitates Gregory in depicting the whole world as a prison:

> [I]f there were some folk born and brought up in a prison, that never came on the wall, nor looked out at the door, nor never heard of other world abroad, but saw some for their shrewd turns done among themself locked up in some strait room, [they would think that those in greater confinement were prisoners but the other inmates were free]. (pp. 281–82, *CW* 12:275)

Thus More in the Tower relativizes his limited freedom by considering himself to be confined in a maximum security cell within the prison of the world.

Unlike Cicero and More, Gregory positively yearned for death, which he "cherished as the entrance into life and the reward for labor" (Prologue 1, p. 4). With his positive outlook on eternal life, he encourages his audience with stories of St. Scholastica, whose soul departed for heaven in the form of a dove (2.34, p. 104), and of her brother St. Benedict, whose road to heaven was covered with rich carpets (2.37, p. 108). The deathbeds of various monks and nuns are attended by choirs of saints chanting antiphonally (4.16, p. 210), by St. Peter (4.14, p. 206), by angels (4.20, p. 214) and by Jesus himself (4.17, p. 211). Heavenly singing (4.15, p. 208) and fragrant odors (4.28, p. 224) grace the deaths of holy laymen. One of these, Count Theophane, anticipates the virtues of St. Thomas More since he was "a man given to acts of mercy, always ready to undertake a good work, zealous in practicing hospitality, and actively engaged in performing the duties of his office as count" (4.28, p. 223). The souls of sinful laymen, however, depart for hell, depicted as "open pits burning with fire" near Sicily (4.36, p. 236). Ten years after he completed the *Dialogues*, Gregory died in Rome, worn out by ill health and his administrative labors.

Immediately faced with the prospect of a violent death, More resembles Cicero rather than Gregory. Thomas Stapleton recounts the full rigor of the original sentence pronounced against More:

> [H]e shall be hanged, cut down while yet alive, ripped up, his bowels burnt in his sight, his head cut off, his body quartered and the parts set up in such places as the King shall designate.[57]

Besides anticipating the pain of beheading in his tale of the Viennese widow, More also considers the usual death for treason. The invalid Antony weighs the pain of a terminal illness lasting a week or two against the short pain of a violent death taking less than half an hour. The sick man's repeated spasms of heart or lungs would be more excruciating than the condemned man's pain of having "a knife to cut his flesh on the outside fro the skin inward" (p. 309, *CW* 12:302). Antony comments dryly that "a man may have his leg striken off by the knee and grieve him not, if his head be off but half an hour before" (p. 299, *CW* 12:293). In the end, the king commuted More's sentence to beheading, a mercifully short death compared to the agony of being hanged, drawn and quartered. After discerning that his refusal to accept the Oath of Supremacy did not stem from spiritual pride, More was able to face his executioners with cheerful courtesy and even with a quip.

In concluding our assessment of this Tower Work, we marvel that More can write so masterfully in such adverse circumstances. *A Dialogue of Comfort* is well organized, especially if one accepts the hypothesis that it is a first draft; furthermore, it is emotionally warm and witty. Even though More fears a violent death, his attitude is not self-

dramatizing or uncontrolled. This is the man who heartens the courtier bringing him the message that he will be executed that morning:

> Quiet your self . . . and be not discomforted; For I trust that we shall, once in heaven, see eche other full merily, where we shalbe sure to live and loue together, in ioyful blisse eternally.[58]

Not only does More imitate the dialogue form of his classical and patristic forebears, but the humanist in the Tower becomes a victim of tyrannical power like Cicero and, like Gregory, a saint.

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Notes

This paper is an expanded version of a presentation made at a conference on The Humanism of Thomas More: Continuities and Transformations, Barnard College, Columbia University, November 16, 1985.

1. K. J. Wilson, *Incomplete Fictions: The Formation of English Renaissance Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 28–45.

2. Germain Marc'hadour, "Here I Sit: Thomas More's Genius for Dialogue," in *Thomas More: Essays on the Icon*, ed. Damian Grace and Brian Byron (Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1980), 30.

3. Bertram Colgrave notes that Gregory never mentions this intervention and suggests that it was created by popular legend on the analogue of Leo the Great's meeting with Attila the Hun, in his edition, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1968), 154 n. 94.

4. Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman, O.S.B., the Fathers of the Church 39 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959). Book and chapter numbers are followed by page references to this translation.

5. All quotations from *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* are taken from the modern-spelling version, ed. Frank Manley, in the Yale Selected Works series (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); the second references in the parentheses are to the original-spelling edition in *The Complete Works*, vol. 12, ed. Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), henceforth designated as "CW 12."

6. Saint Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, ed. Leland Miles (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1965), ciii–iv.

7. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1966), hereafter cited as "King."

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